

Jesus and the Sabbath



What relationship is there between Jesus Christ and the biblical Sabbath?

Dear Andrew, *

I have often been asked: **Why do you keep Sabbath?** My answer is very simple: I keep Sabbath, because I love Jesus. He is my Lord and Savior, my friend and example.

Jesus said: *“If you love Me, keep My commandments.”* (John 14:15 NKJV compare with verses 21, 23 and 24 and 1 John 2:3-6) By obeying Him out of love and thankfulness, my relationship with Him becomes more intimate.

Jesus Christ is the center of the biblical Christian faith. He lives, He reigns and He is coming again soon. He is Creator, Leader, King, Savior, Master, Friend, Doctor, High Priest, God and Lord. Our whole faith stands or falls with HIM.

Amazingly enough, all areas of Jesus’ life and service are closely interwoven with the Sabbath. Please allow me to draw your attention to the **connection between Jesus and the Sabbath.**

Who is the creator and founder of the Sabbath?

The New Testament shows in seven passages that Jesus Christ is the Creator. (John 1:1-3,14; Hebrews 1:1-2) In Colossians 1:15-16 it says: *“... All things were created through Him and for Him.”* (NKJV)

What relationship is there between Jesus as Creator and the Sabbath?

The answer is found in Genesis 2:2-3: *“And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He **rested** on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.*

*Then God **blessed** the seventh day and **sanctified** it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.”*

Jesus Christ, the divine Creator, instituted the Sabbath.

* This name was selected to remind us of the biblical Andrew, who led his brother Peter to Jesus. (John 1:40-42)

Jesus Christ, the divine Creator, instituted the Sabbath.

Psalm 111:4 NKJV points out:

“He has made His wonderful works to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and full of compassion.”

The Sabbath isn't a human invention, but rather it is a concept from our Creator and Redeemer Jesus Christ. Hence, Jesus could say to the Jews that He is the Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:27-28).

After six days of creation, the seventh day of creation was celebrated. The creation of the world was consummated with the Sabbath.

The Sabbath can neither be explained by astronomy nor ethics. The sole reason for the Sabbath and the seven-day week is as an institution from the Creator. Without Him there would be no Sabbath. Since the Sabbath is a day of remembrance of Christ's completed creation, it is consequently a sign of Christ's love and power for **all** people.

The apostle John pointed out that God lays claim to a certain day. He said in Revelation 1:10: *“I was in the Spirit **on the Lord's Day** ...”*

What day was John referring to? The only day, which is called God's day in the Bible, is the Sabbath. It says in the 10 commandments: *“But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God ...”* (Exodus 20:10 NKJV) God referred to the Sabbath as *“... the Lord's holy day ...”* (Isaiah 58:13 NKJV) through the prophet Isaiah. *“If you keep your feet from breaking the*

Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride in triumph on the heights of the land ...” (Isaiah 58:13-14 NIV)

Who was the leader of God's people while they wandered in the wilderness?

The apostle Paul explained in 1 Cor. 10:4 NKJV that it was Christ. He said:

“... the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.” Christ led God's people in the pillar of cloud and fire out of Egypt and through the wilderness to Canaan. What relationship is there between Jesus Christ, the leader of God's people, and the Sabbath?

Hardly anything grows in the wilderness. Hence, Christ supplied the Israelites daily for almost 40 years with manna. It is reported in detail in Exodus 16. The manna had to be consumed every day. Whatever wasn't eaten, rotted overnight. However, on the sixth day they were supposed to gather twice as much, because there was no manna on Sabbath. The manna that was gathered on Friday and kept for Sabbath didn't spoil. This incident shows that Christ practiced the Sabbath with them through the manna for 40 years. Why did God's Son act in this way? We can read the explanation in verse 4 (NKJV):

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions.’”

God’s Son tested His people with Sabbath observance to see if they would keep His commandments – if they would trust and obey Him. Verses 27 and 28 (NKJV) say:

“Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none. Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions?’”

Jesus Christ didn’t ask, how long are you going to refuse to keep the Sabbath? **He tested their complete relationship with Him, if they trusted and obeyed Him, by whether or not they observed the Sabbath.**

Who is the lawgiver, who decreed the Sabbath in the 10 commandments?

Who wrote with His finger the commandments on the tables of stone? According to 1 Cor. 10:4 it was Christ, who accompanied God’s people in the pillar of cloud and fire. He led them out of Egypt (compare with Exodus 20:2 and Jude 4b-5). **That means that the Son of God was the divine lawgiver.** He personally wrote the Ten Commandments on the tables of stone and gave them to Moses.

God has entrusted the writing of the whole Bible to humans. But not the 10 Commandments. These He wrote Himself. After Moses had in anger smashed the tables of stone, because of the Israelites dancing around the golden calf, Christ instructed him to make two new tables of stone. But this time He still didn’t entrust Moses with the writing. Christ Himself wrote the 10 Commandments on the tables of stone the second time and commanded that they be placed in a special compartment in the ark of the covenant in the most holy place of the tabernacle. (See Exodus 32:16 and Deuteronomy 10:1-5). An amazing course of events: God personally wrote the 10 Commandments.

The writing material – stone – indicates permanence. A person doesn’t write on stone with the intention of changing it later. That is why Christ said about this law:

“For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.” (Matthew 5:18 NKJV)

This law will be the basis for the Last Judgment. James called the 10 commandments *“the royal law”* and *“the law of liberty”* (James 2:8,12 NKJV).

Christ, the divine Lawgiver, said: *“If you love Me, keep My commandments.”* (John 14:15 NKJV)

With this statement Jesus not only meant His commands in the gospels, but also the 10 commandments. In the 10 commandments the Sabbath is substantiated by creation. This means that the person, who keeps Sabbath, acknowledges God's sovereignty and the right of dominion of the Creator.

Jesus called the day of rest *"the Sabbath of the Lord your God"* (Exodus 20:10 NKJV). Although Jesus explained that the Sabbath was made for man (Mark 2:27), it still remains God's possession. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath, not us. That means that the Sabbath is sacred because of God's presence. The Sabbath is a gift from our Creator to protect and preserve our relationship with God. Whoever doesn't enter into fellowship with God has missed the essence of Sabbath.

What significance did Christ give the Sabbath in the 10 commandments?

Christ worded the Sabbath commandment the most comprehensively of all the commandments in the decalogue (Exodus 20:8-11). We learn in this commandment that the LORD (Yahweh) is the creator of the heavens and earth.

Only this commandment contains everything that is required for a legally valid enactment of a law: name, office and dominion of the lawgiver: "Yahweh, Creator of the heavens and earth." Every signature contains these criteria

for every law that goes into effect, for example "Joachim Gauck, president of the Federal Republic of Germany". Through the Sabbath commandment the 10 commandments formally went into effect. The Sabbath is God's signature, the seal of God on His law.

I wondered why God's gift of the Sabbath is simultaneously a commandment. I found the following answer: God did this in order to preserve this gift. Otherwise, we would do what we wanted with the Sabbath. We are seeing that despite of the commandment that this often happens.

We have also found another relationship between Christ and the Sabbath. As the divine Lawgiver, He has anchored the Sabbath command in the 10 commandments and given it the signature of His character, His seal.

What relationship is there between Jesus Christ and the Sabbath in connection with our salvation?

The 10 commandments are repeated in Deuteronomy 5. The Sabbath command is given in detail in verses 12-15.

In Exodus 20 Sabbath observance is justified by the creation. In Deuteronomy 5 Sabbath observance is justified by the deliverance from bondage in Egypt (verse 15).

A further reason for Sabbath observance is given with the reference to the exodus from Egypt. This shows that the Sabbath has a more comprehensive meaning than only as a day of remembrance of creation.

In the Bible Egypt is the land of servitude or slavery, which God freed His people from. (Exodus 20:2 compare with Revelation 11:8.) The deliverance from slavery, the exodus through the blood of the lamb (the Passover), rescue from the overwhelming power of the enemy and the departure to the promised land are symbolic for our deliverance from the slavery of sin and death. That means that every Sabbath reminds us of our salvation through Jesus Christ.

Naturally both reasons for the Sabbath are important: If Christ wasn't the Creator, then there would be no resurrection to eternal life. But without the crucifixion, Jesus' act of redemption, then we couldn't be saved from the slavery of sin.

The Sabbath connects us with Christ the Creator and Redeemer. The connection between the Sabbath and salvation is also shown in another way.

The Sabbath is a sign of the **covenant** between God and His children. **God wanted the celebration of the Sabbath to distinguish them as His worshippers.**

In Exodus 31:13 God commands:

“Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you.”

The Sabbath is a sign that the Lord sanctifies us. The holy nation in Exodus 19:5-6 is applied in 1 Peter 2:9 to the New Testament church. Christ is our sanctification and salvation.

In Ezekiel 20:20 the observance of the Sabbath is explained with the words: *“that you may know that I am the Lord your God.”* This is a reference to creation. **Jesus gave us the Sabbath as a sign of His work of creation and redemption.**

What importance did Christ give the Sabbath through the prophets?

Did the prophets make statements about the Sabbath? There are a lot. Let's look at two examples:

Christ sent the following warning through the prophet **Jeremiah** to His people (Jeremiah 17:27 NKJV):

*“But if you will not heed Me to hallow the Sabbath day, such as **not carrying a burden when entering the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day**, then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched.”*

Seventeen years later these words became bitter reality. According to Jeremiah 52:12-13 the house of the Lord and all the great houses in Jerusalem were burned to the ground by the Babylonians.

Jesus Christ, the divine commissioner of the prophets, emphasized the Sabbath. Christ pointed out through Jeremiah the outward circumstances – on Sabbath they shouldn't carry a burden, they shouldn't do any work, because resting outwardly is a prerequisite for spiritual rest and refreshment on the Sabbath.

Christ prophesied through the prophet Daniel that someone would come, who **intended** to change God’s law. This has something to do with the Sabbath. In Daniel 7:25 (NKJV) this power is symbolically called the “little horn”.

“He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time.”

What was changed in God’s law? A comparison of the 10 commandments with the catechism shows us:

1. The commandment, which forbids the veneration of images, was removed from the 10 commandments.
2. The Sabbath was changed to Sunday. Hence, the celebration in the 10 commandments – the Sabbath – was changed.
3. The last commandment was divided into two so that there were again 10 commandments.

What example did Jesus give us regarding the Sabbath during His life here on earth?

The apostle Peter said (1 Peter 2:21) that Christ left us an example *“that you should follow His steps.”* The apostle John emphasized (1 John 2:6 NKJV): *“He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.”* Jesus’ life on earth should be an example for us. What example did Jesus give as a human regarding the Sabbath?

Jesus attended church services on Sabbath and actively took part in them:

“So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read.” (Luke 4:16 NKJV)

On Sabbath Jesus spent time in nature with His disciples:

“At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat.” (Matthew 12:1 NKJV)

Jesus did good on Sabbath:

“Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” (Matthew 12:10-13, v. 12b NKJV)

On Sabbath visiting the sick and hospitality are of great importance:

“Now as soon as they had come out of the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. But Simon’s wife’s mother lay sick with a fever ...” (Mark 1:21-29, esp. 29-30 NKJV) Jesus healed her.

Jesus, the divine Lawgiver, hallowed the Sabbath as a human on earth:

He didn’t abide by the mortal rules of Jews.

As *“Lord of the Sabbath”* (Mark 2:28) Jesus gave us guidelines, which show us how we can experience the blessing that He especially wants to give us on this day. The Sabbath is a blessed day, a holy day and a day of rest.

Jesus *“blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work ...”* (Genesis 2:3 NKJV)

The Sabbath, Jesus Christ's day, **the Christian Sabbath** is a joy to all those who are in Christ. We should call it a "delight" – see Isaiah 58:13.

What did the disciples learn from their Master and Friend about the Sabbath?

Jesus said to His disciples that He was their Master (John 13:13) and that they were His friends. *"You are My friends if you do whatever I command you."* (John 15:14 NKJV)

What did they learn about the Sabbath from Jesus? In Luke 23:54 to 24:1 (NKJV) it is reported: *"That day was the Preparation [Friday today], and the Sabbath [Saturday] drew near."* (According to biblical time calculation the Sabbath begins at sundown: Genesis 1:5; Leviticus 23:32; Nehemiah 13:19; Luke 4:31,40)

*"And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. **And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment.** Now on the first day of the week [Sunday], very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared."* (Luke 23:55-24:1 NKJV)

The disciples had learned from their Master and Friend. They kept the Sabbath even under the urgent circumstance of needing to prepare Jesus' corpse for burial. After the Sabbath ended they went to work and headed for the grave with the spices early on the first day of the week.

Sabbath and the Resurrection

"Now when He rose early on the first day of the week ..." (Mark 16:9 NKJV)

Jesus' resurrection from the dead is an amazing event. Without it our faith would be futile. (1 Corinthians 15:17-18) As a consequence should we celebrate the resurrection?

In the 10 commandments the Sabbath is a memorial day of the completed creation by Christ (Exodus 20:11). It is also a memorial day of the deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt (see Deuteronomy 15), which took place under the leadership of God's Son. The Sabbath is a memorial day of all the mighty acts of the Son of God in creation and redemption. What Jesus Christ did for us on the cross and completed with the resurrection belongs together. Death on the cross without the resurrection wouldn't have helped us. And the resurrection without the sacrifice on the cross wouldn't have either. Both belong inextricably together. And the memorial day for both is the Sabbath.

What advice did Jesus give for keeping the Sabbath during times of crisis?

"And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath." (Matthew 24:20 NKJV)

Did the Christians in 66 A.D. during the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans remember Jesus' words? Most definitely! How did the Lord answer their prayer? The flight of the Christians took place (according to our calendar) on

October 19, 66 – just before the start of the rainy season. If a person had to flee, then this time of the year was a favorable time.

How was the other part of their request about not having to flee on Sabbath answered? The Romans retreated from Jerusalem on October 16, 66. Jesus stressed that an immediate escape was extremely urgent. Why didn't they flee on the spot?

Friday was too short for an escape, since the Sabbath began at about 6p.m. According to Jesus' instructions they were supposed to flee to the mountains – in the area east of the Jordan river.

The distance was too great to cover before the Sabbath started. They didn't flee on Sabbath, but rather kept the day according to Christ's command. They fled on Sunday, October 19, to the small city of Pella in the East Jordan land.

This shows that the church in Jerusalem knew nothing about a change of the Sabbath to the first day of the week in honor of the resurrection 35 years after Jesus' death.

The "Lamb of God" and the Sabbath

When Jesus was baptized at the Jordan by John the Baptist, John revealed through the Spirit of God who Jesus is: "*Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*" (John 1:29 NKJV) In the book of Revelation, which bears the name "Revelation of Jesus Christ"

(Revelation 1:1), it says about the redeemed: "*These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes.*" (Revelation 14:4 NKJV) In the next few verses we find God's last message to humans. The first angel calls to worship the Creator (Revelation 14:7). Worshipping the Creator is closely connected with the Sabbath. In the same chapter (verses 9 and 11) it speaks about those who worship "*the beast*". It is urgently warned not to accept the "*mark of the beast*"; those who accept will be lost. The sign appears to be a countersign of the Sabbath. In verse 12 (NKJV) it says that the redeemed are "those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus".

Revelation 12 speaks about those who have overcome the accuser "*by the blood of the lamb*" (verse 11 NKJV). They are also characterized by the fact that they "*keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ*". (verse 17 NKJV)

Evidently, the Lamb of God attaches great importance to worshipping God, keeping God's commandments and thus also "the Sabbath of the Lord".

The Returning Lord and the Sabbath

In John 14:3 (NKJV) Jesus promised: "... *I will come again and receive you to Myself ...*" The connection with Revelation 14 is significant. God's last message to men before His second coming is in this chapter. In verse 14 Jesus Christ is depicted as the coming King, who is coming to harvest. And in verse 12 (NKJV) those who are waiting for Him are depicted as

follows: *“those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.”* In verse 7 (NKJV) it refers to the Sabbath commandment with the words *“worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water”*. This shows that the Sabbath also has a special meaning for Jesus in the time before His second coming.

What standard will Jesus Christ, the judge, use in the last judgement?

In James 4:12 (NIV) it says: *“There is **only one** Lawgiver and Judge.”*

The name isn't mentioned here. We only learn that the lawgiver and the judge are the same person. In Revelation 19:11-13 the one who judges is called the *“Word of God”*. This is another name for Jesus. In John 5:22 it says that the Father has entrusted all judgement to the Son. According to what law will He judge?

In Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 it says that *“His commandments”* are the basis. In James 2:8-13 it shows that it has to do with the 10 commandments. The Sabbath is part of the 10 commandments.

Jesus closed the Sermon on the Mount with a clear message, which we all want to take to heart. He said in Matthew 7:21 (NKJV): *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.”* In Psalm 89:34 (NKJV) the Lord says: *“My covenant I will not break, nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips.”*

What will the redeemed do on Sabbath on the new earth?

The Bible gives us a clear answer in Isaiah 66:23 (NKJV): *“And it shall come to pass that from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me, says the LORD.”* The redeemed will also worship their Creator and Redeemer on the new earth. The essence of true worship here and on the new earth is obedience from the heart. That is why we daily ask the Lord to *“... uphold me by Your generous Spirit.”* (Psalm 51:12 NKJV)

Keeping the Sabbath on the new earth confirms that it is a day of remembrance to the accomplished salvation and new creation of the people and the earth.

Why I keep the Sabbath

Jesus Christ gave us the Sabbath as a gift. The Sabbath was so important to Him that He practiced it for 40 years with the children of Israel with the miracle of manna. Jesus commanded to keep the Sabbath in His divine basic law – the 10 commandments.

He also redeemed me with His blood and led me out of the bondage of sin. When He chose the Sabbath as a sign of the covenant with His children, then I also want to carry this sign. Jesus' life here on earth is an example for me, which I want to emulate through the power of the Holy Spirit. By God's grace I want to belong to those, who follow the Lamb wherever He goes and to those who worship God Sabbath after Sabbath on the new earth.

I want to belong to those to whom Jesus will say: *“Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”* (Matthew 25:34 NKJV)

To prevent any possible misunderstandings: No one is saved by keeping the Sabbath. We are saved by the grace of God and through our faith in Jesus Christ and by no merit of our own. Obedience is a virtuous fruit of faith and the result of our love for Jesus.

Wouldn't you like to someday spend the Sabbath in the biblical sense and experience how God will bless you? The blessing, which God placed on the Sabbath, is in the same way still valid today as it was then and even will be continued in eternity on the new earth.

The important things are the daily fellowship with Jesus in prayer and Bible study and the weekly Sabbath rest. In this way our relationship with our Lord and our trust in His word will grow. Whoever lives in this manner will be able to say with the psalmist: *“And I will delight myself in Your commandments, which I love.”* (Psalm 119:47 NKJV)

Don't you want to be with those who together with our heavenly Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ celebrate Sabbath on the new earth and worship Him?

With warm greetings and good wishes,

Helmut

The Seven Blessings of the Sabbath

The Bible shows this with seven different verbs.

1. Rest

‘Schabbar’: This word means stopping, taking a break. It emphasizes physical rest on this day.

2. Spiritual rest

‘Nuach’: Here it not only has to do with stopping, pausing and taking a break, but rather it is the idea of keeping still and existing peacefully, simply being allowed to recuperate internally. This is spiritual rest.

3. Mental rest

‘Naphasch’: “being refreshed“, literally “receiving the soul”, (from “nephesch” = soul). It is the word that is used in Psalm 23, when David says: He restores my soul. The Sabbath is a time in which we can let our souls be restored. And it is a time of emotional rest, rest of the spirit, spiritual rest.

4. Celebrate

‘Asah’ is an active word, which describes a creative activity, creative design, something that a person makes or produces. If we were to take this literally, then it would mean: we “create” the Sabbath anew every week, we “make” it.

5. Rest in redemption

Genesis 2:2 (Hebrews 4:4) uses the word ‘kallah’. Here it has to do with rest in the gospel, meaning the rest a person has, which is justified by God’s grace.

6. God gives me new strength

This is the word ‘berech’ blessing. This is the strengthening rest and it means blessing and receiving new strength.

7. Time for love

‘Qadasch’: hallow. This happens through God’s presence. It is a very personal rest.



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